

Several Insurers Go Insolvent

Tens of thousands of retirees' federal Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) protections have been lost annually as pension derisking becomes a more common practice across corporate America. These transactions have the capacity to put our pensions at risk, especially in cases where an insurance company handling our retirement assets might go insolvent in the future.

Between 2012 and 2023, pension de-risking deals in the U.S. totaled over \$350 billion.

It is scary to even ponder: What would happen if the insurance companies managing our retirement security ever go belly up?

Frankly, if you were to think back to the global financial crisis of only about 15 years ago, no one would have ever anticipated blue chip financial firms like Lehman Brothers or Bear Stearns could ever go kaput.

The insurance industry is only lightly regulated at the state level. In contrast to the federal protections granted to defined benefit pensions, group annuity beneficiaries get no ERISA protections.



This means if a group annuity is rendered insolvent or private equity fund managers make a series of very bad investments, the only backstop is underfunded and likely quite bureaucratic, state guaranty associations.

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Steed Issues COLA Request

With a “Bell Head” now back at the helm at Verizon, your Association looks forward to an opportunity to open a fresh dialogue with company leaders, and greater insight into just how important quality benefits and retirement asset protection is to all of us.

Association Chairman Tommy Steed recently shared a letter with new Verizon CEO Dan Schulman offering a cordial welcome to the new boss, introducing him to some of our organization's priorities and offering the chance to communicate directly with the retirees who helped build this great company.

Importantly, the letter also urged Schulman to consider instituting a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) increase — or so-called 13th pension check — to benefit the company's former employees.

For many decades, a COLA increase was a customary part of managing a robust and well-invested pension portfolio for the economic protection of plan beneficiaries, the loyal retirees of Verizon.

Achieved COLA Benefit:

Prior to 1999 the minimum monthly pension benefit issued to certain company retirees was \$400 per month, impossible for anyone to survive on. At the suggestion of your Association, Verizon leadership recognized a moral imperative to act and do better.

Over the ensuing three years minimum pensioners saw increases of \$100 per month, eventually raising their minimum pension payment to \$700 per month by 2001. The company also granted a special lump sum payment to tens of thousands of other retirees who had waited so patiently, with those payments varying depending on one's year of retirement.

Mr. Steed noted that overall consumer prices have risen 26.2% since 2019. For some Americans, those price increases have been offset by corresponding wage increases, but Verizon retirees do not have that luxury.

Steed suggested that, as a measure of goodwill, Verizon grant some form of special lump sum to the combined 97,000 retirees whose pensions were transferred to group annuities in 2012 and 2024.

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Verizon Appoints Bell Head as New CEO

In early October, it was announced that effective immediately, Verizon's CEO, Hans Vestberg, would be replaced by Dan Schulman. Mr. Schulman has had a distinguished business career, serving as CEO of Priceline, PayPal, and as President of Enterprise Growth at American Express.

Vestberg had helmed Verizon since 2018, after joining the company as Chief Technology Officer and executive vice president of the network and technology team in 2017. Vestberg heavily invested in the company's 5G network, becoming the first firm in the world to roll out a 5G network in 2019. Under his leadership, Verizon also focused on expanding its broadband internet offerings, including with the still pending acquisition of Frontier Communications.

Vestberg will continue to serve as a Special Advisor through October 4, 2026, to ensure a smooth transition. He will also remain on the Board of Directors until the 2026 Annual Meeting.

Schulman not only brings a wealth of experience in senior executive positions to the role, but over 25 years of involvement in the telecommunications industry. A “Bell Head” who started his career at New Jersey Bell as an assistant account executive, he sub-

sequently rose through the ranks, becoming president of AT&T's consumer division.



He went on to serve as president of Sprint's Prepaid Group, and as the founding CEO of Virgin Mobile. Additionally, he has served on Verizon's board since 2018.

Verizon's statement announcing his appointment described Schulman as bringing “a combination of financial and operational leadership experience with deep understanding of technology and telecommunications.”

Schulman's tenure at PayPal saw great success. He led the company's transformation to a global payments platform, tripling revenue from \$8 billion to \$30 billion and adding millions of new customers.

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Chairman's Report

By Thomas Steed

Season's greetings to all our faithful BellTel members across the country. With another year winding down, I want to reflect on where we stand heading into 2026.

The biggest news this year arrived in October, when Verizon replaced Hans Vestberg with Dan Schulman as CEO. This sudden move caught many industry insiders off guard, but your Association saw an opportunity to open a fresh dialogue with company leadership.

Schulman is a "Bell Head" like us, having begun his career as an assistant account executive at NJ Bell before spending 18 years with AT&T and becoming the youngest member of the company's senior executive team. He joined Verizon's Board of Directors in 2018 and was elected Lead Independent Director in December 2024.

Following Schulman's appointment as Verizon CEO, I wrote him a letter on behalf of the Association of BellTel Retirees. The letter welcomed the arrival of someone with a ground-level knowledge of our life's work and introduced him to our organization's advocacy for the pensions and benefits of the retirees who helped build this great company.

The letter also encouraged Mr. Schulman to consider initiating a lump-sum cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for all former Verizon employees, who have not seen a COLA increase in over two decades. Consumer prices have risen 26.2% since 2019 alone, so a COLA increase is a legitimate ask for retirees living on fixed incomes.

Verizon executives need to understand that retirees remain an important and loyal constituent committed to the company's success. We devoted our prime working years to building Verizon into what it is today, and we certainly believe this merits consideration for being essential long-term stakeholders in its continued growth.

Meanwhile, healthcare premiums are set to rise significantly for many of us in 2026. I've been saying it for many years: Any cap on retiree health insurance contributions is a race to the bottom, since those costs keep rising over time.

With Verizon making major financial gains in recent years, it would be

Who Is Looking Out for Your Retirement Security?

downright inhumane for them to let our healthcare coverage go by the wayside.

We also need to remain united on the pension front. Over 97,000 Verizon retirees saw their pensions offloaded to insurance annuities without their prior consent in 2012 and 2024. It also happened to 96,000 AT&T retirees in 2023.

The reality is we don't know what these insurance companies are doing with our precious pension assets behind the scenes. Insurance companies are increasingly in bed with private equity fund managers and offshoring assets. Money gets passed around like a game of three-card monte in those circles, which is hardly a comforting thought for our hard-earned retirement assets.

Your Association is here to speak up and fight back against these corporate

practices, but we need your help. I am asking our members what role they see themselves taking in our Association.

If you have a few hours to spare in the average week, perhaps you can help us with recruiting to make our organization stronger. Maybe you can share our cause with your regular lunch group, or maybe you have sons, daughters, nephews, or nieces who went to work at Verizon and are moving up in seniority. Make them aware of our Association too, since retirement is never too far away.

Writing a check is helpful too. We are a volunteer organization, and it's your generous donations that keep us going.

Let's make 2026 a pivotal year for protecting our retirement future. It starts with supporting this Association!

I wish everyone in the BellTel family a safe and prosperous holiday season.

Verizon Healthcare Premiums Set to Rise

If you're a retiree who is not yet Medicare eligible, you may see significant premium increases in 2026.

This is a storm retirees have seen coming since 2008, when annual caps were negotiated on Verizon's contributions towards pre-2008 pre-Medicare retiree health care. Once plan costs exceed that cap, retirees become responsible for the excess.

For pre-Medicare retirees the cap was set at certain dollar amounts: \$15,447 for single retirees, \$30,893 for retiree + 1, and \$38,639 for retiree + family.

Beginning Jan. 1, 2026, the cost of the pre-Medicare MEP HCP is projected to be the following: \$18,211 for single retirees, \$36,422 for retiree + 1, and \$45,528 for retiree + family.

This will result in the following cap excesses and annual premium contributions: \$2,764 for single retirees, \$5,529 for retirees + 1, and \$6,889 for retiree + family.

In response to this situation, BellTel Chairman Tommy Steed stated, "Any lifetime limit or cap on employees' health care only serves one purpose: It accelerates the race to the bottom."

According to IBEW Local 2324 Business Manager John Rowley, IBEW, CWA, and Verizon began negotiations in late May to discuss potentially extending the current collective bargaining agreements.

Significant differences between the parties remained in late June, and by August the Company had chosen to end the bargaining process without adequately responding to the needs and priorities of union members, according to Rowley.

The current collective bargaining agreement expires in about nine months.

Meanwhile if you are Medicare eligible, your coverage should stay the same

in 2026. Still, it is always important to double-check: Which Medicare Advantage plan are you enrolled in? What does the Summary Plan Description (SPD) say about changes?

Verizon's 2026 retiree open enrollment was October 21-30, 2025. This was the only time, outside of a qualifying life event, for retirees to make changes to their healthcare coverage for 2026.



Qualifying life events for health insurance changes "outside that window" include major life changes like marriage, divorce, the birth or adoption of a child, and the death of a dependent. You generally must make changes within 30 days of the event to avoid waiting until the next open enrollment period.

Broadly speaking, health insurance costs are set to rise for millions of people across the country next year, with more than 300 Affordable Care Act (ACA) marketplace providers proposing premium hikes averaging 20% for 2026. Since premiums increase with age in most states, early retirees not yet eligible for Medicare may find coverage even harder to afford.

ACA premium tax credits are set to expire at the end of 2025, causing a debate that has fueled this year's government shutdown.

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Following Pension Spinoffs Retirees NEED to Obtain Death Benefit Certificates

In the wake of the March 2024 Verizon pension risk transfer deal, the Association of BellTel Retirees reminds its members to obtain written confirmation about Death Benefits your family is entitled to.

In this deal with Prudential and RGA, Verizon purchased a single-premium group annuity contract for 56,000 retirees and their beneficiaries.

We all want to look out for our loved ones and guarantee they are taken care of when our time comes. In order to do this, we must be aware of where our Pensioner Death Benefit claims are located and have the proper documentation on record to ensure our spouses and beneficiaries have a smooth and easier process filing a claim at the appropriate time.

"I was one of the thousands of retirees impacted by the Verizon pension risk transfer deal back in 2012," said Association of BellTel Retirees Secretary Don Kaufmann. "As a result, I was left wondering about the state of my benefits and how to ensure my family is taken care of when my time comes. I cannot stress enough the importance of getting all proper documentation from Verizon and Prudential to make sure your loved ones are easily able to access these benefits."

While the administration of your Basic Life Insurance remains with Verizon, you should know that your Pensioner Death Benefit claims were moved to Prudential and/or RGA along with the pension liabilities.

For this reason, it is important that you obtain a record of your Pensioner Death Benefit so your spouse or beneficiary can file a claim at the appropriate time.

Affected members should have received a letter in the mail from Prudential and/or RGA to explain the transfer. We recommend saving these letters for your records to make it easier for your beneficiary to claim these benefits.



Retirees residing in Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, New York, or any U.S. territory now have 100% of their pensioner death benefit amount guaranteed by Prudential. The letter these affected retirees should have received is titled "Your Death Benefit Summary" and it states the exact amount of your pensioner death benefit payable to your beneficiary.

Retirees in all other states will have 50% of their Pensioner Death Benefit amount guaranteed by Prudential and 50% will be guaranteed by RGA.

This benefit has mandatory beneficiaries (normally a spouse or dependent child) or a \$500 estate payout if there is no beneficiary available. In order for your beneficiary to receive the claim, your spouse must be living with you at the time of death. One exception to this rule is if you or your spouse pass away in a nursing home, the beneficiary can still claim the Pensioner Death Benefit as long as you are filing a joint income tax return.

For more information or to obtain proper documentation for your beneficiaries, we recommend calling Prudential at 844-446-2778.

"We worked hard to earn these benefits," Kaufmann said. "Do not let them be taken away by these de-risking deals because of not having the proper documentation. Know what you are owed and how to obtain it!"

Despite the pension risk transfer from 2024, your Basic Life Insurance administration is still with Verizon and your chosen beneficiaries and benefit amount remain the same. To ensure a smooth claim process for your loved ones, we recommend calling Verizon Benefits at 855-489-2367 to obtain a copy of your policy and designated beneficiaries.

In a time where pension risk transfers have become all too common, being aware of your death benefits location and keeping a record of all proper documentation can make all the difference for your spouse and beneficiaries when your time comes.

OUR MISSION:

The Association of BellTel Retirees is dedicated to promoting the protection and enhancement of the pensions and benefits for all retirees and for the current and future beneficiaries of the companies derived and evolving from the original Bell System.

Since 1996, the Association has worked to convince the companies to protect and guarantee, rather than raid or erode, the hard-earned retirement security for hundreds of thousands of dedicated current and former union and management personnel and their families.



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Verizon Healthcare Premiums Set to Rise

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Insurers also cite other reasons for their proposed rate increases: cost of care and increased use, inflation, labor shortages, and hospital acquisitions and mergers among them.

The trend of private-sector employers offering retiree health benefits has significantly declined over the last few decades. Only about a third of very large employers (those with 20,000 or more employees) still provide some form of health coverage to retirees.

We cannot let Verizon continue

down the path of weakening or even abandoning retiree health coverage altogether. Every one of us spent many years — often many decades — dedicated to the success of this company. With Verizon making major financial gains in recent years, it would be downright inhumane for them to let our healthcare coverage go by the wayside.

Your Association will continue to keep this issue front and center and provide more insights as we approach August 1, 2026, when the current collective bargaining agreements expire.

Pension Stripping Transactions Drop Sharply in Q2 of 2025

Pension risk transfers experienced a steep drop in transaction volume in 2025.

In the second half of 2025, they dropped 64% compared to the same period in 2024. Total pension risk transfer sales in the first 10 months of 2025 amounted to \$11.5 billion, a 56% decrease compared to 2024.

According to the Life Insurance Marketing and Research Association's (LIMRA) Annuity Research division — an association that conducts market, economic, and financial research for life insurance and financial services companies — high economic volatility, limited deal activity, and increased litigation concerns were cited as the chief reasons for the downward trend in pension stripping in the second half of 2025.

2024 was a record-breaking year for pension risk transfers, with 785 transactions amounting to \$51.8 billion in retiree assets being spun off into group annuities. However, that year also saw a record number of lawsuits related to pension risk transfers, with class action

lawsuits filed against Lockheed Martin, Lumen Technologies, Alcoa, and Verizon.

More recently, a lawsuit was filed in September 2025 against technology giant IBM, for offloading \$14 billion in pension assets to Prudential Insurance. The lawsuit accuses IBM of putting the retirement security of over 132,000 IBM retirees in jeopardy.

Keith Golembiewski, assistant vice president and head of LIMRA Annuity Research, observed that as more insurance carriers enter this sector of the group annuity market, it “will ultimately propel strong PRT sales in future years.”

Furthermore, while overall pension stripping transactions slowed in 2025, certain regions of the U.S. did not experience the same downward trend. The South, home to many Fortune 500 companies, continues to account for the largest share of the U.S. pension risk transfer market.

According to LIMRA's research, the structure of pension stripping sales is

changing. “Lift-outs” allow plan sponsors to transfer the risk for specific retiree groups or beneficiaries rather than the entire plan and are becoming the most common type of transaction. Lift-outs are favored by sponsors who want to manage risk without fully terminating the pension plan.

Despite the decline in pension risk transfers in 2025, 94% of corporate defined benefit plan sponsors acknowledge they still plan on fully divesting from their pension plans, according to a MetLife survey. Market volatility and economic uncertainty are the chief factors driving this trend.

Plan sponsors often point to rising Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation (PBGC) insurance rates as a major reason to shed retiree pensions. Per participant rates for flat-rate premiums have risen dramatically from \$31 in 2007 to \$106 in 2025.

The PBGC is a federal group under ERISA that serves as a critical safety net for retiree pensions in case their company goes bankrupt.

Several Insurers Go Insolvent

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These offer much less security than the federal Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation.

Edward Stone, Special Counsel to the Association of BellTel Retirees, has been fighting this issue on our behalf for many years. Mr. Stone is working to contain derisking efforts and amend ERISA to protect retiree funds when offshore entities and managers get involved.

So, how common is it for insurance companies to become insolvent?

While the insurance industry would say, rare to never, we have certainly seen an increase in U.S. insurance-company insolvencies, receivership, and liquidations. Some of the most recent cases of insurers entering the rehabilitation include PHL Variable Insurance Co. in Connecticut, Columbian Mutual Life Insurance Co. in New York, and Columbian Life Insurance Co. in Illinois.

Large insurance companies are not exempt from such insolvencies. In the case of PHL Variable Insurance Company, they had \$3.82 billion in assets.

In May 2024, this life and annuity insurer, together with its subsidiaries (ConCord Re, Inc. and Palisado Re, Inc) entered rehabilitation. The Connecticut Insurance Commissioner was appointed the rehabilitator by the Con-

necticut Superior Court, meaning they took over all of PHL Variable's operations and assets.

This decision came after the company entered a financial crunch — effectively a margin call — caused by having too many large life insurance policies offered to individuals over 70 years old being paid out around the same time.

Along with the rehabilitation order, the court imposed a Moratorium Order in June 2024 to limit certain payments and transactions under policies and annuities.

Under this Moratorium, PHL Variable policyholders may never receive their full benefits. Death benefits have been capped at only \$300,000 per person, even if your policy is worth much more. However, in what seems cruel to the worried customers, policyholders must still pay full premiums to maintain their less than anticipated coverage.

In the case of Columbian Mutual Life Insurance Co, the company had admitted assets of about \$1.41 billion at the end of 2023. The company's liabilities were stretched thin due to an overly optimistic miscalculation of mortality rates.

When more deaths occurred than they anticipated, more claims were filed leading to financial troubles for the company. In August 2024, the Superintendent the New York State Depart-

ment of Financial Services, Adrienne A. Harris, was appointed the rehabilitator by the New York State Supreme Court in Broome County.

Another company under the gun is Columbian Financial Group, Columbia Life Insurance Co. in Illinois, which also faces financial troubles that led to entering a rehabilitation phase in 2024. The company's \$323.2 million in assets weakened due to similar issues with regard to miscalculating death rates.

In some cases, the insurance company is completely liquidated by regulators, as was the case of United Property & Casualty (UPC) in Florida's estimated \$300 million in assets in 2023. UPC underwrote a large number of homeowner policies in areas overly exposed to hurricanes and catastrophes, particularly in Florida. When the insured parties came to collect these claims after natural disasters, it led to the company's financial ruin.

Insurers going insolvent in cases like these truly threaten the strength and integrity of our pension assets, leaving all of us vulnerable to the possibility of reductions and restructuring.

Pension stripping can be a threat to Americans' retirement security. It is critical that retirees work collectively to make sure state and federal officials recognize that there is a need for greater transparency surrounding pension transfers and to hold these insurers accountable as fiduciaries for our retiree assets.

Plaintiffs in AT&T Lawsuit File Amended Complaint

A Massachusetts judge accepted a recommendation in early October to dismiss a consolidated complaint brought by AT&T retirees against the telecom giant for its 2023 pension risk transfer. That \$8.05 billion transaction offloaded the pensions of 96,000 AT&T retirees to Athene Annuity and Life Co.

However, according to BellTel Special Counsel Edward Stone, the plaintiffs successfully filed an amended complaint with the Court. They also agreed to a briefing schedule for defendants to re-file their motion to dismiss, effectively extending the case until at least mid-December.

According to Mr. Stone, the amended complaint adds significant additional facts and makes comparisons to other more suitable annuity providers. The amended complaint also highlights in detail the self-dealing that the plaintiffs believe took place when AT&T and State Street chose Athene for the pension risk transfer deal.

The consolidated case — *Piercy et al v. AT&T Inc. et al* — dates to March 2024 and combines two class action complaints filed against AT&T and State Street Global Advisors in the U.S. District Court for the District of

Massachusetts. Plaintiffs alleged that AT&T's selection of Athene to take over retirement plan liabilities jeopardized the financial security of the 96,000 retirees involved.



The suit also alleges that State Street, acting as AT&T's fiduciary adviser, would benefit from the selection.

The main thrust of the complaint lies in the retirees' loss of the protections of federal law through an ERISA-governed plan. Although ERISA does not prohibit transferring pensions to insurance companies, it does require that a fiduciary satisfy exacting standards when selecting an annuity.

According to the complaint, AT&T has "deprived Plaintiffs of all the protections of federal law; substantially degraded the value of the pensions; and put the retirement benefits at substantial risk of default."

Crucially, while U.S. District Judge Nathaniel Gorton initially dismissed the case, he found that the plaintiffs did have standing to sue. That left the door open for it to continue, despite the initial dismissal based on the perceived insufficiency of the plaintiffs' substantive claims.

The lawsuit seeks to amend the AT&T plan to fully comply with protections afforded by ERISA to defined benefit pension plan participants and beneficiaries.

New Verizon CEO

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In a statement announcing his appointment, Schulman was light on the specifics of his goals, saying that under his leadership, "we are going to maximize our value propositions, reduce our cost to serve, and optimize our capital allocation to delight our customers, and deliver sustainable long-term growth for our shareholders."

He was slightly more forthcoming in his first memo to Verizon staff, where he praised the work of his predecessor in spearheading the company's 5G and broadband expansion strategy, and promised to continue that work.

Verizon Board Chair Mark Bertolini described him as "the right leader to chart Verizon's next phase of increased customer focus and financial growth."

BellTel Chairman Tommy Steed said: "We are pleased to welcome a leader who is so steeped in the history of our industry and has a ground-level knowledge of our life's work. On behalf of thousands of fellow Verizon retirees around the country, I look forward to opening a dialogue with Mr. Schulman to assure that the company respects the dignity and well-being of the men and women who built this great company."

Many news outlets noted the sudden nature of the leadership change, and that it comes at a time when Verizon is facing stiff competition and slowed subscriber growth. In the first half of the year, Verizon experienced a net loss of 400,000 subscribers, while competitors AT&T and T-Mobile both saw net subscriber growth.

The Association of BellTel Retirees looks forward to working with Mr. Schulman to address the needs and concerns of the retirees of the companies derived from the Bell System.

Steed Issues COLA Request

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Those two transactions, which totaled over \$14.3 billion, have collectively saved Verizon untold tens of millions of dollars in premiums that it would have otherwise paid to the federal Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation.

Steed wrote: "Like you did during your initial 18 years with the Company, we devoted our prime working years to building Verizon into what it is today, and we certainly believe this merits consideration for being essential long-term stakeholders in its growth and success."

It is clear we cannot rely solely on our annual Social Security COLA to keep up with rising costs. For many retirees the 2.8% COLA to Social Security benefits and Supplemental Security Income pay-

ments in 2026 will be offset by increased healthcare premiums.

The standard Part B premium paid by most Medicare beneficiaries — \$185 a month this year — is projected to rise to \$206.50 a month in 2026. If this 12% increase goes into effect, the average Social Security recipient on Medicare would only see their monthly benefit increase by about \$34.50, as opposed to \$56.

BellTel retirees remain an important and loyal constituent of the Verizon workforce and remain connected to the company's continuing success. It is our Association's position and desire to remain vigilant and continue to seek opportunities to press for enhancements that would have a positive impact on our collective retirement security.

NRLN NOT AFFILIATED WITH BELLTEL

We alert all our members about financial solicitations from a group using a variation of our Association's name and erroneously suggesting they provide service to our members.

The use of "BellTel Retirees" by National Retiree Legislative Network (NRLN) is misleading and confusing to our members at the Association of BellTel Retirees. Please know that your Association of BellTel Retirees is wholly unaffiliated with the National Retiree Legislative Network (NRLN).

Know that your Association works in close coordination with Retirees for Justice, a non-profit lobbying organization led by our own Special Counsel Edward Stone.

Attention Association Members - We Are Better And Stronger Together!

Giving Tuesday began in 2012 as a simple idea: a global day dedicated to giving back. It takes place annually on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving, which falls on December 2nd this year.

For retirees and active employees and their families, Giving Tuesday is an opportunity to strengthen organizations that work tirelessly to protect rights, preserve dignity, and secure the futures that they earned.

We anticipate that our members will make a donation to the Association of BellTel Retirees during the 2025 season of giving. Your support is critical: our work to defend the pensions, healthcare, and benefits to retirees cannot continue without financial contributions from members like you.

Corporate obligations are only as strong as our ability to hold companies accountable, and that requires resources. Every gift, no matter the size, empowers the Association to fight for your rights and ensure that the commitments made to you are honored. Please join us on or in the weeks that follow Giving Tuesday to stand up for what you have earned and deserve!

Know that your board of directors at the Association understands and shares your same burden of increasing costs: energy, insurance, rent, etc. In fact, our current donations are lagging by 19% compared to this same time last year. In response, your board has reduced expenses where reasonable to do so without compromising our mission or service to you, our valued members.

Our mission is simple: to protect the benefits you've earned. We fight on your behalf through proxy proposals, annual letters requesting COLA adjustments, and legislative efforts against pension stripping. But our work goes far beyond advocacy.

We keep you informed with a quarterly newsletter and timely updates through print, social media, and our hotline. Every year, we answer hundreds of calls from retirees needing help with health care benefits, death benefits, pension concerns, or simply knowing who to contact when issues arise.

Our office is your go-to resource—backed by a dedicated board and staff who work tirelessly for you. But this support only continues with your help. Don't let it disappear—donate today and ensure we can keep fighting for you.

We know that our members will respond generously because you understand that your donations enable a vital and powerful Association.

With that in mind, we have set a challenging, but surely reachable, \$75K goal for our 2025 Giving Tuesday campaign. You can depend on your board of directors to donate generously!

For those who are able and have already been donating, we thank you. I hope you are able to be generous again this year. For those who have not donated in a while, we really would appreciate your generosity now!

How You Can Help:

- **Donate:** Visit our donation page on our website or use enclosed donation card to contribute. Every contribution, no matter the size, helps us in our mission to protect you.
- **Stay Informed:** Read our newsletters and social media pages to see the impact of our efforts.
- **Spread the Word:** Encourage fellow retirees, current employees, and friends to support our cause.

In addition to your typical generous donation, consider your Association

during your current and future planned giving. This includes estate planning, your annual required minimum distribution (RMD) to a qualified charitable distribution (QCD), and adding the Association as a beneficiary. We recommend you seek advice from your financial or legal advisor on planned giving. You should also discuss “use and purpose” when naming the Association as a beneficiary.

Not everyone wants to commit to making a gift in their wills or estates. Some prefer the increased flexibility that a beneficiary designation provides by using: IRAs and retirement plans; Life insurance policies; Bank Accounts; Certificate of Deposit (CDs); Brokerage Accounts.

It is very simple to name the Association as a beneficiary. Start by requesting a change-of-beneficiary form from your policy administrator or download the form from your provider's website. Make your desired changes and return the form to establish your gift.

Qualified charitable distribution (QCD) is a mutually beneficial way to donate. Not only does it count toward required minimum distribution (RMD), but the distribution is completely tax-free. That means you can still take the standard deduction on your taxes instead of itemizing to get the charitable contribution deduction.

The IRS reminds those aged 73 and older to make required withdrawals from IRAs and retirement plans by Dec. 31. We recommend you seek advice from your financial or legal advisor.

We are better and stronger together in solidarity!

Una Kelly, Treasurer
Laura Whitlock, Director



ASSOCIATION OF BELLTEL RETIREES

Department 3170, PO Box 986500, Boston, MA 02298-6500

I want to support the Association of BellTel Retirees Inc. in the fight to protect the pensions and benefits of all retirees and active employees. Enclosed is my tax-deductible donation:

\$150 \$100 \$75 \$50 OTHER _____ We appreciate any amount you can donate

Or use your credit card: VISA MASTERCARD DISC AMEX

Acct.# _____ / _____ / _____ / _____ Expiration Date _____ Zip Code: _____

Please consider adding \$1.00 or more to help offset costly transaction fees and ensuring your donation will fund the work we do on your behalf.

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip Code _____

E-mail _____

Telephone # _____

I am a: Management retiree _____ Union retiree _____ Other _____ Company Retired from: _____ Year Retired: _____

You can also donate online by going to www.belltelretirees.org and click on the DONATE NOW button.

Consider a recurring donation – an easy and safe way to budget your contribution.

The Association of BellTel Retirees Inc is a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization.

Participate in BellTel’s Dynamic Community

Stay connected with the Association of BellTel Retirees online community — your network of fellow retirees and advocates working to protect the benefits you earned.

Joining and remaining active in our online community is one of the best ways to stay informed about important updates affecting retirees, as well as to engage with others you share so much with.

Your Association uses platforms like Spotify, Apple Podcasts, YouTube, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter to keep members regularly informed about the latest retirement and pension news.

We are excited to announce new episodes of our retiree audio podcast, The Bell Effect, where you can listen to insights from experts and advocates for retirees about the most pressing topics — from pension risk transfers to retiree healthcare and legislative action.

One of our latest episodes features Tommy Steed, Edward Stone, and Don Kaufmann discussing the fallout from Verizon’s 2024 pension risk transfer deal. Another features former Pioneers Executive Director Laura Whitlock,

sharing insights on how retirees can band together to protect their benefits.

Podcasts are one of the easiest ways to stay informed, as you can turn on an episode on any smartphone in the car, while doing household tasks, or before falling asleep!



Over the last few months, we’ve also produced and shared four informative and engaging videos on our YouTube channel with relevant information, including from the 2025 Annual Member Meeting.

Our YouTube channel has over 1,000 regular subscribers.

Follow us on Facebook for updates, news alerts, and community discussions. Our recent post, breaking news of the new Verizon CEO, Dan Schulman, received over 20,000 views.

Keeping you informed on important issues is a valued service. Please go on-

line to see and share the latest news on matters impacting retirement, pension and benefit developments, telecommunications topics, and even some Throwback Thursday memories.

At BellTel, we are always looking for ways to connect and better engage with our community, and online has been a great way to do so.

Be sure to follow us to stay updated with your Association, share stories, reconnect with fellow retirees, and support our ongoing efforts to protect your pensions and earned benefits.

Find The Bell Effect on Apple Podcasts by entering “The Bell Effect” in the search bar, or find it on Spotify by doing the same there.

Visit our YouTube page at www.youtube.com/@BellTelRetirees/videos, and check out our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/associationofbelltelretirees.

Our LinkedIn page is www.linkedin.com/company/belltel-retirees, and you can find our Twitter page at www.x.com/BellTelRetiree.

Be sure to subscribe so you never miss a beat!

Social Security Administration Reveals 2026 COLA

Starting in January, you can expect to see an increase in your Social Security check thanks to the 2026 Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA).

The Social Security Administration (SSA) announced a 2.8% COLA to Social Security benefits and Supplemental Security Income payments in 2026. This is an approximate \$56 boost to each monthly paycheck.

Before you start adjusting your budget for this increase, it is important to note that this \$56 increase was calculated prior to any deductions such as Medicare.

Medicare’s trustees have projected that the standard Part B premium paid by most Medicare beneficiaries — \$185 a month this year — will rise to \$206.50 a month in 2026. If this 12% increase goes into effect, the average Social Security recipient on Medicare would only see their monthly benefit increase by about \$34.50, as opposed to \$56.

The SSA sets COLA increases according to the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers, or CPI-W from the third quarter of the last year a COLA was determined to the third quarter of the current year. That index is tied to an average change in prices for certain goods purchased by those still in the workforce. Some contend that this index is unfair to seniors faced with rising costs of other types of goods and services.

The new payments to approximately 75 million Social Security recipients

will begin in January 2026.

Here is a further breakdown of the payment schedule for SSA recipients:

- People born between the 1st and 10th of their birth month will get their first COLA increase on January 14
- Those born between the 11th to 20th of their birth month will receive the COLA bump on January 21

- Recipients born between the 21st and 31st of their birth month will get the new COLA on January 28

Meanwhile, people who started collecting Social Security before May 1997 or who receive both Social Security and SSI will get their new Social Security COLA on January 2.

MEMBER MAIL BAG



“Thank you so much for all you do for the BellTel retirees. I started with C&P of Washington in 1956. Retired after 37 years. A wonderful company to work for in those days.”

— J.P. Mallon

“I remember when being in Ma Bell was like being in a family. We all felt close to each other. By the time retirement came in 1998 that had all changed.”

— William Stuart via Facebook

“Thank you for continuing to fight for us retirees.”

— Mary Aspinall

“Thank you for all that you do!!!”

— Robert Schneider

“Keep up the great work!”

— Anthony Cutajar

“Thank you for all you do for retirees like myself.”

— Michael Fortin

“I doubt we will ever see a COLA increase now that they sold our pensions.”

— Ellen Chase

“Thank you for your publication keeping us informed of all the work you do, the issues that must be addressed, and what we, as BellTel retirees, can do to help.”

— Scott Margolin

“Thanks for the great work. I am retired for 31 years.”

— Pat Fell

“Thanks so much for your outstanding and ongoing work for all retirees. It is very much appreciated. I will continue sending donations whenever I can.”

— Eleanor Stothers

INDUSTRY NEWS & NOTES

Verizon Acquires Starry to Expand Wireless Broadband

On the heels of the announcement of Verizon's leadership shuffle, with former PayPal CEO Dan Schulman taking the company's reins, Verizon also announced that it has acquired the internet service provider (ISP) Starry for an undisclosed sum, in order to expand their broadband internet infrastructure.

Starry debuted in 2016, rolling out its internet services in Boston. The company has a somewhat unconventional approach to internet connectivity, beaming its internet signal from large antennas into homes through high-speed, millimeter wave broadcasts, instead of the standard – but more expensive – wires.

Starry connections often require an unblocked line of sight between the transmitter and receiver, as millimeter wave signals can be easily disrupted.

Starry fired half its workforce in 2022 and filed for bankruptcy a year later. It has approximately 100,000 customers across New York City, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., and Denver.

Verizon plans on using Starry's technology to expand its internet offerings in urban locations. In announcing the acquisition, Verizon said that they were "uniquely positioned to accelerate this expansion because of its significant fiber backbone and extensive holdings of mmWave spectrum."

The deal is expected to close in 2026 but is subject to regulatory approval by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

Verizon Posts Subscriber Losses in Q3

In late October, Verizon reported its Q3 2025 earnings, which were largely described as "mixed" by industry and financial reporters. The telecommunications giant reported a quarterly revenue growth of 1.5% year-over-year (Y/Y), with a total revenue of \$33.8 billion for the quarter and earnings per share (EPS) reaching \$1.21.

Verizon lost a net 7,000 phone subscribers, a reality far different from the estimates that predicted it would add 19,000, and the third consecutive quarter of net subscriber losses. This

also stands in stark contrast to Verizon's chief competitors, AT&T and T-Mobile, who respectively experienced net gains of 405,000 and 1 million phone subscribers in the last quarter.

The company saw better results with its wireless services, which is currently their largest business. Verizon added 306,000 broadband connections in Q3, ending the quarter with over 13.2 million connections, as well as adding 261,000 fixed-wireless access connections. Wireless revenue rose 2.1% Y/Y to \$21 billion.

Newly installed Verizon CEO Dan Schulman remarked on the earnings call that "Verizon has deep strengths and incredible potential, but the blunt truth is we haven't captured the customer growth opportunities this strong foundation enables."

Schulman took the opportunity to lay out his vision for Verizon, aiming to realign its culture and cost structure towards customer satisfaction, operational efficiency, and profitable expansion, while "aggressively sunset[ting]" legacy businesses that are no longer profitable.

Frontier Acquisition: Status Update

In September 2024, Verizon Communications Inc. announced its intention to acquire Frontier Communications Parent, Inc. The \$20 billion deal is expected to close in early 2026.

Verizon agreed to purchase Frontier for \$9.6 billion and absorb \$10 billion of its corporate debt. The merger would add Frontier's 2.2 million fiber subscribers across 25 states to Verizon's approximately 7.4 million Fios subscribers in nine states and Washington, D.C.

Frontier has approximately 13,000 employees, about 70% of whom are represented by unions around the country.

As of May 2025, the FCC approved the merger on the condition that Verizon remove or lessen its DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) programs.

One of the final hurdles for the deal to reach the Q1 2026 closure goal is the approval of the deal by state regulatory commissions where Verizon and Frontier are incumbent local exchange carriers (ILECs). The states needed to approve the merger include Connecticut, Arizona, California, Illinois, Nevada, Ohio, Oregon, South Carolina, Washington, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania.

As of June 2025, The Connecticut Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) unanimously approved the acquisition. The latest approval came from The Arizona Corporation Commission who voted unanimously in September 2025.

Other states have proven more difficult to get approval from. One instance is the California Public Utilities

Commission. The CPUC's Public Advocates Office reached several settlement agreements with Verizon in September 2025, on infrastructure, service quality, staffing, and affordability.

These settlements include Verizon offering \$20 per month of broadband service to income-qualified households for at least 10 years. Verizon will also hire at least 600 new union employees in California with a commitment of no involuntary layoffs of CWA employees for the four years after the merger closes, according to the settlement agreements.

The issue still stands that California is concerned with the lack of DEI programs at the company. The CPUC believes that Verizon stripping its DEI programs is a direct violation of California's Public Utilities Code Section 8283, which requires certain public utilities to issue mandates for increasing procurement from women, minority, disabled veterans, and LGBT business enterprises.

It is believed that the CPUC cannot block the deal and that it just wants clarification on the matter.

If the deal goes through, Verizon will be enabled to deploy new fiber, facilitating the retirement of copper networks across many Frontier territories to ensure that more communities have access to advanced technologies.



Some Frontier customers are concerned that the merger will lead to higher costs, as Verizon's plans are typically more expensive. Frontier fiber customers are also concerned that Verizon's fastest residential Fios plan is 2Gbps. In comparison, Frontier has higher speeds at 5Gbps and 7 Gbps.

This monumental deal is actually a re-acquisition from a 2015 spinoff between Verizon and Frontier. In the original deal, Frontier acquired Verizon's spin-off wireline operations in California, Florida, and Texas, for \$10 billion, including 3.7 million voice connections, 2.2 million broadband connections, and 1.2 million FiOS video connections. Since then, Frontier filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in 2020 with \$17.5 billion in debt.

Now, Verizon is looking to buy back some of their former assets that might have new value in the current market. In addition to adding Frontier's 7.2 million fiber locations to its network, Verizon also plans to build out 2.8 million more locations by the end of 2026.